

# Impressive Middle Eastern stands at World Travel Market

The stands of Middle Eastern and North African countries at this year's World Travel Market (WTM) were characterised by professionalism and exquisite design which showcased the region's numerous tourist attractions to a receptive international audience.



Oman used the creative elements of its destination brand in the design of its magnificent stand with curved lines which mirrored Arabic calligraphy. The colours were drawn from Oman's brand

palette to convey its strapline: beauty has an address.

Among the first time exhibitors from the Middle East was the Libyan Export Promotion Centre, the Touring Automobile Company of Iran, The Iraqi Tourism Board, Marta Consulting, Katara Hospitality and Waldorf Astoria Hotel in Ras Al Khaimah.

GAA-Marta Consulting provides innovative consulting services to

governments and the tourism industry which maximize the short-term economic benefits of destinations without jeopardizing long-term environmental, cultural or social integrity. It has been appointed as the GCC & Europe representation office for the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism.

Heba Aridi, the lead account manager said, "We are very pleased to receive this appointment, since Lebanon is a

Egyptian stand



## Dubai Gold Souk popular with Indians



country that thrives on tourism and is a fascinating destination with so much to offer. Beirut was ranked No. 1 travel destination worldwide in 2009.

Katara Hospitality, formerly known as Qatar National Hotels Company was officially established in 1993 to capitalize on the growth potential of Qatar's tourism industry and has since then become a leading hospitality owner, developer and operator locally and internationally. It marked another milestone in its foray for international affirmation by participating at the WTM.

“The event in London marks our first presence at an international exhibition after the successful announcement of the company's rebrand as Katara Hospitality earlier this year”, stated Hamad Abdulla Al-Mulla, the Chief Executive Officer. “This vibrant four day business-to-business event provides us with a good opportunity to get an insight into the latest industry trends, while enabling us to share our development plans and tap into new business opportunities”, he added.

With a current portfolio of 26

properties operational or under construction, Katara Hospitality has previously announced that the company aims to own 30 hotels by 2016 and 30 more by 2030.

The participation by countries of the post revolution countries of the Arab spring was spectacular: Egypt had 104 exhibitors, Tunisia 35 and Libya 12.

After the revolutions the future is bright for tourism. The writ of the new Libyan government may not

yet extend over the whole country, it is still not possible to get a tourist visa and the east and the desert, a haven for smugglers, is strictly out of bounds to visitors.

But despite formidable challenges Libya's travel companies, under the direction of the Export Promotion Center, assembled an impressive stand at the World Travel Market in London and showcased the county's amazing tourist attractions. The stand took

Iraqi stand





the form of a Libyan building with many enticing posters: the Corinthia Hotel described itself as an oasis of luxury.

The 12 exhibitors on the Libyan stand ranged from tourism businesses, destination services to hotels, cultural tours and desert safari specialists. There was universal agreement among the Libyan exhibitors that the future for Libyan tourism is bright and the industry will grow from strength to strength.

With 1,300 miles of palm-fringed coastline, hot weather and a host of ancient ruins to be discovered, Libya could have potential to attract scores of tourists. It is home to many historic and archaeological sites including five UNESCO world heritage sites at the Roman Empire outpost Leptis Magna and the Greek Hellenic city of Cyrene. Tripoli is known for its walled medina and relaxing old-world ambience. It is home to a number of grand mosques, statues and fountains.

Another major attraction is the Acacus Mountains , close to the Algerian border, known for their dunes, deep ravines and cave paintings. The oasis towns of Ghadames and Ubari were popular with tourists before the revolution. One of the exhibitors at the World Travel Market, Nureddin Fitouri the General Director of Alalam Tours said that the true Libya will be seen in future. “In the past everything was on hold. I have been in tourism for the past 14

years and I was frightened about the future – it was unknown but now I am very happy. We are still building a government and will succeed in building the tourist industry. Libya is a big country with mountains, deserts, culture. We know that in the past tourists were very happy to visit Libya. They found something they could not find anywhere else.”

Fitouri’s optimism is shared by Wesam Alhagigi of Asfar Al Huroj



Libyan stand at the World Travel Market

Medusa statue at Leptis Magna



Tours. “ I am really positive about the future of the tourist industry. We have the product but we don't know how to sell it. We have a lot of great historical sites, the deserts and 2,000 kms of beaches and unspoilt coastline on the Mediterranean. We just need to improve the basics, like the hotels. There will be major changes in the next five years. We will do more in five years than Gaddafi did in 40 years.”

The Egyptians and Tunisians are equally upbeat. Government officials in Egypt are stepping up their campaign to encourage tourists back to the country. In

October Antiquities Minister Muhammad Ibrahim re-opened the Pyramid of Chefred (Khafre) and six ancient tombs at Giza after a long restoration project. He said he was keen to stress that Egypt is a safe country for tourists.

Khalid Nagdy Director of Sales & Marketing of Concorde El Salam Hotels in Egypt said that visitors are returning to Egypt in large numbers. Hergada and Sharm El Sheikh are okay but Cairo is a little bit uncertain. He admitted that the revolution has seriously affected the earnings of the tourist industry but it is recovering.

“The political situation in Egypt is not like before and people want to see the good side now,” Nagdy emphasised. “It will be even better than in the past.” And after the Arab spring Egypt's promotional line: “Where it all begins”, has taken on a new significance.

Tunisia is waiting for tourist numbers to return to pre-revolution levels. Karim Kamoun, Co-ordinator of Strategic Development for Yadis Hotels said that tourism is picking up since the revolution – 2012 is much better than 2011.

“I am optimistic about the future, now Tunisia has democracy and the people are happy. We still have a transitional government. Next year we will have an election. When we have a government for five years it will have a new programme for Tunisia and new areas will be developed for tourism, especially cultural tourism. Tunisia has eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites and these have to be developed as an alternative to the beach. There is also very nice

desert three or four hours from Jerba with heated tents and very nice facilities. It may even be possible for tourists to combine a trip to Tunisia with a visit to Libya. Or they will fly directly to Libya.”

The WTM Global Trends Report 2012 – in association with Euromonitor International, said that 2011 was a difficult year for the Middle East across all travel and tourism categories with arrivals declining by 10% and

**Nureddin Fitouri General  
Director Alamtours**







Tunisian stand

hotels suffering the biggest decline of 15% in sales. This year is expected to end with positive growth as the impact of the Arab spring eases, although some markets such as Syria and Lebanon will continue to suffer due to the Syrian crisis. Positive growth should carry on into 2013 and beyond if conditions remain favourable, but it will be slower for some categories as they stabilise after the rebound in 2012.

Big spenders with cash to splash

are driving the trend for Middle Eastern hotels to be built inside shopping malls. Wealthy consumers from the likes of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have plenty of disposable income and love shopping – so mega-malls in the Middle East are booming.

International travellers, expatriates and locals wanting to buy luxury brands they cannot find at home are also seeking accommodation along with their retail therapy. To cater for these eager globe-trotting

shoppers, hotels are increasingly being built inside or next to malls, such as Dubai's Kempinski Hotel at the Emirates Mall and the Address Dubai Mall attached to the Dubai Mall, one of the largest shopping and entertainment destinations in the world.

The report also states that tourism in the Middle East is mining a rich vein of success thanks to an influx of Indian tourists buying gold. A recent surge of low-cost flights has

opened up new travel opportunities for Indian tourists, many of whom head for gold souks across the Gulf, especially Dubai.

Trips from India to Gulf countries are forecast to post a compound annual growth rate of almost 7% over 2012-2016-, fuelled by growing disposable incomes and affluence, said the report. The first quarter of 2012 saw gold worth US\$5 billion exported from Dubai to India.



Wesam Alghagigi  
Asfar Al Huroj  
Tours